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SUBJECT: JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES, SCIENTOLOGISTS UNDER
CONTINUED PRESSURE

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[1](#)B. MOSCOW 546

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. The campaign against the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) in Russia, instigated by General Prosecutor Yuriy Chayka in early 2009, continued in May and June. While a judge dismissed one case against the JW branch in Tolyatti on insufficient grounds, the situation in Samara Oblast, Sverdlovsk Oblast, and the Republic of Altai worsened. A judgment against JW literature in Gorno-Altai, scheduled for July, could result in a ban against JW literature through Russia. Officials in Omsk Oblast also filed a criminal case against the local Church of Scientology's humanitarian center, showing that multiple religious groups remained under the microscope. Religious leaders outside of the mainstream continued to criticize the restructuring of the Ministry of Justice's expert commission, stocked with self-described sectology experts, but refrained from suggesting Russian Orthodox or Kremlin complicity in changing its role. End Summary.

Jehovah's Witnesses: One Step Forward, Three Steps Back

[1](#)2. (SBU) The campaign against the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia continued in May and June, with the few positive developments vastly overshadowed by repressive government actions (reftels). On May 13 and 27, Samara Regional Court Judge Tamara Roschina presided over hearings concerning two lawsuits initiated to liquidate the JW's local religious organizations (LRO) in Samara and Tolyatti. The Samara Region Prosecutor claimed that, under Article 14.1 of the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, religious organizations may be liquidated by a court decision in the case of "frequent and gross infringement" of the norms of the Constitution or federal laws, and under Article 14.2 for "encouraging the refusal on religious grounds of medical help to persons in life-endangering conditions and for inciting citizens to refuse fulfillment of the civic obligations." JW attorneys countered that any decisions made by its congregants were personal decisions outside of the influence of the LRO.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In Tolyatti, the prosecutor claimed that the JW LRO played a negative role in the breakup of two families, and encouraged a congregation member to not perform alternative civilian service (ACS) at a weapons-manufacturing facility. Roschina ruled that the LRO played no part in these incidents and dismissed the case in Tolyatti on May 29. JW attorneys attributed the ruling, in part, to Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin's April 16 letter to Russian Federation General Prosecutor Yuriy Chayka, which expressed concern for the current scrutiny of the JW in Russia. During the hearing, three JW congregation members testified that their decision to perform ACS instead of military service, a right guaranteed by the constitution, was a personal choice and not the result of Tolyatti LRO pressure. During the Tolyatti proceedings, one of the prosecution's key witnesses Nagim Ryazapov

unexpectedly filed a motion calling JW a "fascist" organization, and asked to participate as a third party instead of as a witness. Roschina refused Ryazapov's motions and appeared frustrated with his antics, ultimately helping JW's case, according to JW attorney Marc Hansen.

¶4. (SBU) The fate of the Jehovah's Witnesses LRO in Samara, charged with encouraging its congregants to refuse medical aid (blood transfusions) and for refusing military service in accordance with their religious beliefs, remained uncertain as of June 18. The Samara Regional Prosecutor, according to Hansen, had previously arranged for an expert study with Samara State University. JW attorneys successfully appealed this arrangement, arguing that an expert study conducted by a state institution under the Samara Regional Prosecutor's authority would color its objectivity. Roschina granted the JW attorneys' motion for the expert study to be conducted by the Ministry of Justice's Federal Center for Court Expert Studies in Moscow, a review board for court materials (Note: This is not the Ministry of Justice Commission run by Alexander Dvorkin). Prior to the hearings, LRO representatives discussed the cases with Samara Regional Ombudsman Irina Skupova, who sent her deputy Lyudmila Temnova to the courtroom. Hansen noted that two local television reporters and four Russian Orthodox Church members attended the hearings.

¶5. (SBU) On May 24, 2009, in Sverdlovsk Oblast, FSB and police officials allegedly broke up a Jehovah's Witness congregation (over 50 people present) at a building rented for a worship service. Officers informed all in attendance that they were being detained, then photographed them and wrote down their passport information. Sverdlovsk law

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enforcement officials allegedly refused JW requests for access to an attorney, failed to inform them of their rights, and did not issue any protocols confirming the reasons for their detention. They then escorted all who did not have identification documents with them to the police station. These proceedings were filmed by correspondents for the local ATV television network.

¶6. (SBU) JW leaders in Sverdlovsk Oblast later filed complaints with the local police, especially regarding two related incidents. On May 24, police detained and questioned a 15 year-old boy (his parents, not present at the worship service, are congregation members) and placed him into a children's home against his will. As of June 18, he was still in government custody, despite appeals from the child's parents and applications to the management of the children's home. On May 31, JW congregation member Ms. Aleksandr Matsyugina suffered a miscarriage after being "badly shaken" from the May 24 police raid and a subsequent May 27 interrogation, during which police threatened to put her in a detoxification cell.

¶7. (SBU) In June 2009, authorities in Gorno-Altai, Republic of Altai, presented two new obstacles to freedom of worship for Jehovah's Witnesses. On June 3, in accordance with a Gorno-Altai City Court order based on the prosecutor's recommendation, researchers from Kemerovo State University submitted an expert study on the religious foundations of JW literature. Hansen told us on June 8 that the expert study concluded that over twenty of the confession's publications, previously targeted by the Gorno-Altai prosecutor's office, incited hatred of other religions. JW representatives filed an interlocutory appeal against the expert study's conclusions which will be heard on July 1. The Gorno-Altai City Prosecutor also initiated a separate criminal investigation of JW's LRO on June 5, and after obtaining a court order, police raided the homes of several congregation members, including Chairman of the LRO Aleksandr Kalistratov. Police subsequently raided the LRO's place of worship, but did not interrupt the worship service which had just ended.

¶8. (SBU) On June 16, the Omsk Regional Prosecutor filed a criminal case against the Omsk Church of Scientology's L. Ron Hubbard Humanitarian Center for "applying the methods of dianetics" which brought on health and psychiatric problems, led to suicidal behavior, caused negative spiritual changes, and destroyed the physical structure of Russian citizens. Attorneys representing the Scientologists claimed that the investigation and criminal case constituted violations of Russian law and one's constitutional rights. Scientology members told www.kasparov.ru correspondents on June 16 that the only foundation for such accusations laid in the "conclusions of a few anonymous experts" who have determined that the teachings of The Church of Scientology (COS) lead to violent actions. COS continues to face registration problems in Moscow, despite a 2007 European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling that Moscow authorities had violated the Scientologists religious freedom rights (Note: The Ministry of Justice last denied the Moscow COS's registration in late 2008). Moscow COS Director Natalya Alekseyeva told us on June 18 that officials in Barnaul, Vladivostok, Chelny, and Samara are attempting to liquidate local branches, while those in Novosibirsk, Penza, Yekaterinburg, and Surgut City filed charges of "extremism" against the COS. She reported that cases in Penza and Yekaterinburg were dismissed as groundless while a judgment in the others remained pending.

Non-Mainstream Religious Groups Blast Expert Commission

¶9. (SBU) Non-mainstream religious groups, concerned about undue government repression, united in criticism of the Ministry of Justice's Commission for the Implementation of State Expertise on Religious Science (Commission). According to a June 2 report by Forum 18 journalist and religious analyst Geraldine Fagan, the Union of Old Believers theologians, calling for the Commission's abolition, stated that its establishment was "a direct threat to the constitutional rights of the citizens of Russia" and a "dangerous catalyst for inter-confessional strife." Head of the Baptist Union Yuriy Sipko said that the creation of the Commission "only underscores the helplessness of our state authorities who, instead of following constitutional principles of freedom -- including religious freedom -- constantly feel the urge to curb these freedoms." Pentecostal Bishop Sergey Ryakhovskiy called for the

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resignation of Justice Minister Konovalov, named by Commission Vice-Chairman Roman Silantiev as the man responsible for the Commission's creation. Seventh Day Adventist Vice Chair of the Euro-Atlantic Division Viktor Vitko joined Slavic Law Center's Roman Lunkin's call for the removal of all council members. According to Forum 18's June 2 report, Moscow State University Chairman of Religious Philosophy and Religious Studies Igor Yablokov vowed on April 3 to not attend future council meetings as the assembled experts "did not bear even the remotest resemblance to a meeting of scholars" (Note: Yablokov is the only person out of 24 previous council members that was retained by Justice Minister Konovalov).

¶10. (SBU) Although many religious groups continued to lament the widespread powers given to the Ministry of Justice Commission, Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) Head of the Department for Relations between Church and Society Vsevolod Chaplin unsurprisingly expressed his approval in a May 12 press conference. According to Forum 18, Chaplin claimed that the Commission now contained "specialists at a serious level, active, well-known in society." Fagan told us on June 17 that journalists, religious leaders, and scholars have refrained from implicating Patriarch Kirill or Chaplin as the architects of the Commission because "there is not any proof at this point" and the ROC probably preferred to distance

itself from Dvorkin. She did concede that the only reason for the Commission's overhaul was to close any loopholes in the GOR's efforts to oust non-mainstream religious groups. She also suggested that Konovalov's reputedly close ties to Medvedev, as well as their mutual Orthodox leanings, could mean that the Kremlin played an active role in selecting the Commission's members.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses are not convinced that Kirill's ascension to power, followed by a coordinated campaign against the JW, are simply a coincidence. Some argue that Kirill's open criticism of non-traditional religious groups in the 1990's could be resurfacing, only this time with the necessary tools to rid Russia's traditional religions of unwanted competitors. As the ROC deepens its involvement in Russian society, hoping to perpetuate a spiritual rebirth and solidify its role as the central institution to stamp out social ills, it could also look to improve its market share at the expense of Protestant and other non-mainstream groups that found success in post-Soviet Russia. Should it be successful, the ROC could be in a position to speak for over 75 percent of Russia's citizens as the country faces daunting future demographic and moral crises.

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